

Knowledge of our nation's history is an important part of the American experience. By understanding and remembering the struggles of our nation's forefathers and the birth of our democracy, we are better able to appreciate our rights and privileges as residents and citizens of the United States. To that end, history and civics are an integral component of a public school education, and a required element in the U.S. naturalization and citizenship process. Yet, several [polls](#) over the past decade suggest that many Americans do not know their history or their civil rights.

In order to promote greater historical and civic consciousness, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has mounted an initiative to preserve historical documents, promote the teaching of American history in our schools, and offer summer seminars and institutes on history and government. The NEH also promotes learning about our civil rights through youth literature. Every year, the NEH, in collaboration with the American Library Association, releases the "We the People Bookshelf," a list of books that celebrate the American experience. These texts offer fascinating literary perspectives on diversity, history, democracy, justice and immigration, among other topics.

The We the People Bookshelf 2006-2007 is "Pursuit of Happiness" and includes fifteen novels and short story collections that address American values and the American identity. These books, categorized by recommended reading level, are:

Kindergarten to Grade 3 *Aesop's Fables* by Aesop *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* by Virginia Lee Burton
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
by Robert Frost

Grades 4 to 6 *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt *The Great Migration: An American Story* by Jacob Lawrence
These Happy Golden Years
by Laura Ingalls Wilder
The Journal of Wong Ming-Chung
by Laurence Yep

Grades 7 to 8 *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* by Jean Lee Latham *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine

L'Engle
za Rising
by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Esperan

Grades 9 to 12 *Kindred* by Octavia Butler *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
Common Sense
by Thomas Paine
Leaves of Grass
by Walt Whitman

School and public libraries may apply through the NEH to receive free hardcover copies of the We the People Bookshelf. Several of the books are also available in Spanish translation. Last year, 2,000 libraries received free copies of the bookshelf. For more information about the theme, the books or the application process, you may visit www.humanities.gov or www.ala.org/wethepeople

In addition to the We the People Bookshelf, the American Library Association also offers a recommended children's reading list. The following books also celebrate and explore the American experience, especially through issues of ethnic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic diversity:

A Rose for Abby by Donna Guthrie *Aekyung's Dream* by Min Paek *Bein' With You This Way* by W. Nikola-Lisa
Building a Bridge
by Lisa Shook Begaye
Come Home with Me: A Multicultural Treasure Hunt
by Aylette Jenness
Father's Rubber Shoes
by Yumi Heo
Grandpa's Corner Store
by DyAnne Di-Salvo-Ryan
Heroes
by Ken Mochizuki
How My Parents Learned to Eat
by Ina Friedman
Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice

by Sylvia Rosa-Casanova
Miss Tizzy
by Libba Moore Gray
Molly's Pilgrim
by Barbara Cohen
Nim and the War Effort
by Milly Lee
Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street
by Roni Schotter
Now We Can Have a Wedding
by Judy Cox
One Afternoon
by Yumi Heo
One Hundred is a Family
by Pam Munoz Ryan
Smoky Night
by Eve Bunting
Something Beautiful
by Sharon Dennis Wyeth
Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch
by Eileen Spinelli
Something's Happening on Calabash Street
by Judith Ross Enderle and Stephanie Jacob Gordon
The Sneetches, and Other Stories
by Dr. Seuss
The Story of Ruby Bridges
by Robert Coles
The Trees of the Dancing Goat
by Patricia Polacco
The Ugly Vegetables
by Grace Lin
Tikvah Means Hope
by Patricia Polacco
Tomas and the Library Lady
by Pat Mora
Yoko
by Rosemary Wells

I encourage you to share these books with your family. Although they are geared for school children, their lessons and insights can be appreciated by all. Read individually or together, they can supplement our understanding of and appreciation for our nation and the experience of being American.